

212

A LETTER

FROM A

PERSON IN TOWN

TO HIS

FRIENDS IN THE COUNTRY,

WHEREIN IS EXPLAINED

The True Ground of Regeneration.

G. J. K

Matthew, ch. vi. v. 33. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his
"righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,

AND SOLD AT THE

JUVENILE LIBRARY, NO. 259, OXFORD-STREET.

Price 2d.



TO THE READER.

THE following pages were not originally designed for publication; they were addressed to certain individuals, for whose interest the writer was particularly anxious, with a view to instruct them in the principles of true Christian piety. Upon reflection, it occurred to him that what might be useful to a few, might, through the blessing of God, be made so to many: in which hope he commits his ideas to the press, recommending them more especially to the consideration of those, who have not time or opportunity to peruse larger works on the same important subject.

A

LETTER, &c.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I HOPE you have all received much spiritual benefit from those passages in the sacred pages to which I referred you last year: in this hope I shall, through the help of God, make some observations to shew the absolute necessity of a real and substantial regeneration in Christ, as that alone which can give us any degree of happiness here, or any solid hope of being admitted to the mansions of bliss, when we depart this life. The first Testament, which contains the law and the prophets, presents to our contemplation a variety of types and shadows of the glad tidings we find realized by Jesus Christ in the Gospel.

The Epistles written by St. Paul and the other Apostles, are comments on this blessed Gospel; and both together shew, in the clearest light, the dreadful depravity of our nature, originating from the first Adam's fall; and our restoration by the second Adam Christ, the serpent bruiser, spoken by God, upon the fall of our first parents' into their nature, as a seed of grace, to be a common benefit to all their posterity to the end of time.

In

In this degenerated age, when infidelity makes such rapid strides, satan has stirred up many to use the pen as weapons to war against the word of God, and by that means has shaken the faith of thousands. And when one church is divided into such a multiplicity of forms, it is the duty of every sincere Christian to search the scriptures, with fervent prayer to God, that he may be taught of him the true spiritual sense, and not rely wholly on others who are equally frail and liable to error as himself. There are certain simple and important truths in the gospel that will admit of no controversy; and are so sublime, and strike so forcibly on the heart of every man, that all commentary from the pulpit or by writing must be superfluous. Among these are the following, which I particularly recommend to your attention; persuaded that if they are embraced by a sincere and lively faith, they will teach you more spiritual knowledge than all the religious books that were ever written :

“ Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

“ Christ is that true light which lighteth every man
“ that cometh into the world.

“ Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after
“ righteousness, for they shall be filled.

“ Christ shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and
“ with fire. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except
“ a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of
“ God.

“ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that
“ which is born of the spirit is spirit.

“ The father loveth the son, and hath given all
“ things into his hand.

“ He that believeth on the son, hath everlasting
“ life.

“ Whoever drinketh of the water that I shall give
“ him, shall never thirst again; but the water that I
“ shall

“ shall give him shall be in him a well of water spring-
 “ ing up into eternal life.

“ For I came down from heaven not to do mine
 “ own will, but the will of him that sent me.

“ He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood,
 “ dwelleth in me, and I in him.”

This last passage has, I confess, occasioned much controversy; but it is so striking, so full of spiritual comfort, that I could not resolve to omit it; especially as it is so fully and so beautifully explained in another place by Christ himself. “ It is the spirit,” says our blessed teacher, “ that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak, they are spirit, and they are life.”——I shall now proceed to point out a few more passages among those with which the holy scriptures abound, equally beautiful and important.

“ Then spake Jesus again unto them: I am the
 “ light of the world; he that followeth me shall not
 “ abide in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

“ If ye continue in my words, then are ye my dis-
 “ ciples indeed.

“ Without me, ye can do nothing.

“ He that doth not gather with me, scattereth.

“ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them; and
 “ they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life:
 “ and they shall never perish; neither shall any man
 “ pluck them out of my hand.

“ I and my father are one.

“ I am the resurrection and the life; he that be-
 “ lieveth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he
 “ live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me
 “ shall never die.

“ I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that
 “ abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth
 “ forth much fruit: for without me ye can do no-
 “ thing.”

“ If

“ If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you,
 “ ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto
 “ you.

“ If ye, that are evil, know how to give good gifts
 “ to your children, how much more shall your hea-
 “ venly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that
 “ ask it.”

“ Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be
 “ opened unto you.

“ Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I
 “ will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and
 “ learn of me, for I am meek and lowly, and ye shall
 “ find rest for your souls; for my yoke is easy, and
 “ my burthen is light.”

That continual self-denial and mortification of the flesh, and that cross which we are commanded daily to take up and follow Christ, is such a stumbling block to many who read the gospel, that they are afraid of entering on a religious life. To those in an unregenerated state, these appear unsurmountable difficulties; but when the enlightened mind, with a firm and steady faith, views the blessed promises of Christ to all those who are truly his disciples, these obstacles vanish as they look towards that blessed source for power and strength to combat them.

Another stumbling block is, that continual forgiveness of our enemies enforced so powerfully throughout the whole gospel, revenge being so sweet to our fallen nature. Not only in the Lord's prayer, but throughout the sacred pages, is our own forgiveness made conditional of our forgiveing others: our blessed Lord has taught us only to implore forgiveness upon those conditions.—Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. The true Christian will go much further; he will not only forgive an injury done to his person, but will be moved with pity to see his enemy so far sunk into the evil principle,
 and

and will pray with sincerity and fervency for him: this, and this only, is the touchstone that can prove whether we have a grain of saving faith.

The great Mr. Harvey, in his divine contemplations, seems to have had very mistaken ideas of heaven, when he places it far above the stars; for could we be conveyed as far as that place he assigns for it, in an unregenerated state, we should still remain at the same distance from it as if we were on the earth: for we learn from the sacred gospel that heaven is a pure innate principle, too fine and subtle for our gross eyes to behold. Mahometans, Jews, and Christians all agree in opinion, that God is an universal spirit that fills every part of the vast universe; consequently, heaven must be as well here as at any remote distance the human mind is capable of forming to itself. Our holy guardian angels must always be in heaven, and St. Paul has said our conversation is in heaven. The idea, therefore, of a local heaven must be erroneous: it is as much here as any where else; and that soul which is truly regenerate can alone penetrate into it.

I shall now, through the blessing of God, make a few remarks on prayer; the necessity of it, and what is implied by that admonition of St. Paul, "to pray without ceasing." Many writers have called prayer the *food of the soul*; but this is certainly a mistake, though it must be admitted that it is the only means God hath appointed by which we can receive the true spiritual food. The means that our heavenly Father makes use of to convict sinners, are almost infinite; but to obtain that true hunger and thirst after righteousness, spoken of in the gospel, we learn there is but one. Our blessed Lord, in one part of the gospel, has contracted the whole law and the prophets into this simple command, to do to others as we wish they should do unto us; and has declared there it is the whole.

In

In another part: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart," &c. "and thy neighbour as thyself." on these two commands, says he, hang all the law and the prophets. All sin, in like manner, may be contracted to this one; that we are all broken off from God; and consequently all righteousness must be included in this, the being re-united again to God. By what means soever we are convicted or convinced that we are sinners, a true conversion would instantly follow, (if not from our own fault) and we should be brought to that true repentance never to be repented of: for God would immediately quicken that seed of grace that lay inactive in our souls, by that true baptism of the Holy Ghost and with that sacred fire.—The sinner is then brought to see, in some measure, the depravity of his own heart, and the dreadful state he is in by nature; and how incapable he is of doing the least thing imaginable towards his own salvation; as feeling and finding that his will runs counter and opposite to the will of God. In this state, the sinner is brought into the deepest humility, the true basis of all Christian virtues; and thinks no child of Adam had so depraved and wicked a heart as himself. No language can describe with what joy the sinner in this state embraces the glad tidings of the gospel; he finds himself the heavy laden sinner to whom Christ promises to give rest; he feels the only true hunger and thirst after righteousness, the whole bent of his soul; his utmost wishes and fervent desire is to be made like unto Christ: this is the only true method of praying spiritually; this is that earnest desire, that divine hunger, which Christ has pronounced blessed; and has declared, throughout the sacred pages, shall he be satisfied. St. Paul describes such praying to be beyond the power of utterance, and to exceed all language how great or good soever. Such a disposition of the heart is continually *praying without ceasing*, and will soon

B

find

find the pearl of great price; and may be said to take heaven with a holy violence. In public worship and family prayer, some form of words must be made use of, but the same disposition of the heart is always required.

We find in our blessed Redeemer three most essential virtues, which are the spring and basis of all the rest, viz. his great humility; his perfect resignation, not only to the will of his heavenly father, but to that of his most bitter enemies; and his fervent love and charity for all mankind. These virtues he implanted in the whole of our human nature, and carried through the most dreadful trials, temptations, and sufferings, making us thereby one again with God from whom we were broken off and separated by sin. The earnest desire of our souls should, therefore, be to have these essential virtues quickened in us, and to be made a living branch of that glorious vine.

As that deep humility which characterized our blessed Lord, is a pearl of richest price, and, in our fallen state, the highest gift of heaven, I shall now, through the help of God, endeavour to explain by what means it may be obtained and quickened in us; and in what manner all other virtues arises, and can never be separated from it. With respect to the means, there is but one: the comparing our deeds with the righteous laws of God, and the holy life of Christ; reflecting that we are brought into existence like a wild asses colt; that we are rising like a bubble in the ocean of time; and sinking down to be no more heard of. That our lion and tiger like nature, is on the slightest occasion ready to break forth and arise into the fury of hell. These things, if duly considered, are sufficient to humble the most lofty spirit, and give birth to that true humility in which alone is our security. When we feel our total inability to do the least thing towards our own salvation, and expect it wholly from

from God through Christ, then arises that true resignation, that humble desire that God's will may be done in us; and from thence, that meek light in which is all our spiritual joys. That meek heavenly light is a thousand times more passive than any thing we can imagine: we have a feint resemblance of it in the sun, whose light resisteth nothing, but rejoices and vivify all nature. This heavenly light which flows from the celestial fire, must be shed abroad in every regenerated soul, with the crystal water of life, and that blessed fire of love which never can be taken from the truly resigned soul. But to return, as our humility increases, all the other virtues gather strength from it. That thorn in the flesh that St. Paul prayed might be removed, he tells us was not but that God informed him his strength could only be manifested when he had the clearest sight of his own weakness. It hath been almost my whole prayer for a great length of time, that God would make me truly humble in body, soul, and spirit; that is, that he would give me the clearest sight, and feeling sense of my dreadful depraved heart: thanks be to his holy name, he hath heard and granted my prayer; for though I have committed so many sins in my youth, that the thoughts of them has been a sore burthen, yet the wickedness and depravity of my heart exceed all the descriptions I ever found in the sacred pages.

When it is said, that "charity will cover a multitude of sins:" charity, we must remember, is only a scriptural term for love; for love and charity are the same. That one law of love in heaven and earth is this, that we love God for himself, and all mankind in and for God, as the whole hierarchy of angels must do. This charity is of the most extensive nature, and does not exempt the poor any more than the rich; yet, if our circumstances are slender and our income small, God does not require us to do more than we are able; for the

the widow's mite, or a cup of water given to a distressed brother with a sympathising heart, where the means are really desired, is as acceptable to God as the largest sums from the rich; and Christ has promised shall not lose its reward. One poor distressed brother may, at proper intervals, have it in his power to relieve and comfort another: to visit the sick and afflicted is another blessed act. To think favourably of others who may differ from us in external or the ceremonial part of religion, and to reprove always with meekness. To promote the true worship of God as much as we possibly can by our own example, particularly to enforce the practice of it in our own families, and to pray fervently that all may be brought to see the depravity of their own hearts, and be turned to the wisdom of the just. Such substantial acts of charity as these, will cover sins of the darkest die; not merely considered as external acts, from which we can never claim any merit, but as they are the only certain testimonies, and demonstrations that we are in a state of regeneration and union with Christ. In this blessed state, our sins, however great or multiplied, are all covered by his blood, and nailed to his cross; as is well known to those who are in that blessed principle of light there is no judgment or accuser. Before I conclude, my dear friends and relatives, it is my wish to point out to you, and guard you against a few errors which are propagated by the most popular preachers of the present day; I mean the Calvinistic doctrine, which the Rev. Mr. Whitfield embraced and revived in this country: the principles of which are the particular election of a few to bliss, and the eternal reprobation of by far the greatest part of mankind to eternal damnation. Such a doctrine as this cannot be edifying; on the contrary it must have two very pernicious effects: the one, to induce many who have no good works to prove they have a grain of saving faith, to presume

presume they are elected; and the other, to intimidate weak minds and tender consciences, and drive them into a state of despair, which not unfrequently ends in a deep melancholy bordering on insanity. This doctrine is founded on the mere letter of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans and Galatians, which St. Peter remarked was difficult to be understood; and which, he observes, many would wrest to do the utmost prejudice. The deep ground of a part of St. Paul's writings cannot clearly be understood, except we have the same measure of the blessed spirit he had. It is a happy thing for the sincere Christian, that he has nothing to do with the doctrine of Calvin or Luther, councils, creeds, or articles, as he hath in his breast a clear conviction that all religious systems, opposite sectarian principles, are in a fallen state, and bear no comparison to that one free church that was first established by the apostles. What God hath permitted, and doth still in his righteous providence permit to exist, we must rest satisfied with, having a charity for all; and having no scruples of conscience to join with any in the external ceremonial worship of God, for to the pure, all places and forms must be pure. That part of the church service is, I think, very excellent where it includes all mankind. I make it a point, and find much scriptural benefit from it, of attending every day morning and evening prayer; nor do I ever omit joining in prayer at home with my family: for without that continual supply of spiritual food, which prayer is appointed as the means of obtaining, our spiritual body must languish and die, for God hath appointed no other means by which we can receive it. Let me entreat you, therefore, my dear friends, as you value the good of your eternal souls, if you have not attended to this important part of your duty, that you will now take up the resolution that Joshua did; and that, let others do what they will, you and your house

will

will serve the Lord. His ways, I can now declare to you from experience, are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are peace: religion is the source of every earthly as well as heavenly comfort; for without some degree of holiness no man ever did or can see the Lord. I hope and sincerely pray, my dear friends, that you may have read this epistle with that attention the importance of the subject demands; particularly that part of it which I have selected out of the gospel of St. John. He was the beloved disciple of our Lord, and had more of the divine light than any being on earth (Christ excepted:) the other evangelists are very great; for where one hath omitted any thing essential, the other has supplied it. The other parts of the scripture present us abundance of spiritual helps, and may be compared to rivers which all take their rise, and flow into that immense ocean of love the blessed gospel. Moses and all the other prophets and apostles had this blessed spirit by measure: not one of them ever claimed an infallibility. In Christ only we read, "the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily."

To taste, in the smallest degree, of happiness here or hereafter is, to contract all our own wants, and to increase and expand our love and charity. Let us, my brethren, strive to excel each other in acts of love, charity, and benevolence, even to those who despitefully use us. Let us love all as brothers and sisters in Christ: this is the blessed charity that never faileth; and must remain when earth and sun shall be no more. It is this charity alone that has induced me to write you this long letter: and may the gracious and ever blessed God of love open your spiritual eyes to see in it the true ground of the Christian faith, and of all Christian virtues.— May he incline you to turn your thoughts inward, and to seek him in the centre of the soul, where
only

only he is to be found: for a God a far off was never yet found by any man. Attend only to that still voice which is continually speaking in every soul on earth, and it will lead you into all truth, and into that glorious light and liberty of the sons of God; and cause you to embrace with transport the blessed tidings of the gospel.

I am, in all Christian love to you and all friends in the country,

your most affectionate

brother,

T. G.

9 FE63

A PRAYER

BY THAT GREAT

AND TRULY PIOUS MAN

Mr. WILLIAM LAW.

OH Heavenly Father, infinite fathomless depth of never-ceasing love, save us from ourselves, from the disorderly workings of our fallen long corrupted nature; and let our eyes see our hearts, and spirits feel and find thy salvation in Christ Jesus.

O God, who madest us for thyself, to shew forth thy goodness in us, manifest, we humbly beseech thee, the life-giving power of thy holy nature within us: help us to such a true and living faith in thee; such strength of hunger and thirst after the birth, life, and spirit of thy holy Jesus in our souls, that all that is within us may be turned from every inward thought or outward work that is not thee, thy holy Jesus and heavenly working in our souls. Amen.